

Springhill College  
Mobile, Alabama

(Vicinity)

Mobile Co.

ALA  
HABS No. ~~35~~-34  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
District No. 16

Historic American Buildings Survey  
E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer  
Ala. Polytechnic Inst., Auburn, Ala.

SPRING HILL COLLEGE  
Spring Hill, Mobile County, Alabama.

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Ownership:

Present Owner: Catholic Church. 1830 - 1936

Date of Erection: Old Building 1830.  
New Building 1869.

Architect: James Freret. (new building)

Builder: Beroujon.

Present Condition: Good.

Number of Stories: Three.

Materials of Construction: Brick and Stucco.

Other Existing Records:

See: Birmingham News, March 17, 1935.

"OLD ALABAMA COLLEGES INTERESTING"

By E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer, H.A.B.S.  
Auburn, Alabama.

See: "HISTORY OF SPRING HILL COLLEGE"  
From Centennial Number  
"CORSAIR"  
1830 - 1930.

Additional Data: Extracts from Spring Hill College published at the seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the College.

The first task of Bishop Portier, after his consecration, was to visit all parts of his vast vicariate that reached from the Northern bounds of Arkansas to the Southernmost part of Florida. A careful study of the situation convinced him that after the need of a clergy, the most pressing want was that of a great educational institution for youth.

Another thing too, he saw, that in his utter destitution nothing could be accomplished without recourse to Europe. So to Europe he went.

During the latter half of the year 1829, there was for him no truce to travel or fatigue. Wherever there was hope of help, there his ringing voice was heard. Help came and came in abundance.

In his old home of Lyons several priests and several seminarists answered his appeal and volunteered to follow him to America. To Rome he then wended his way for Rome's blessing, and also to lay his cause before a friend and ecclesiastical superior, Cardinal Fesch. Though living in the City of the Popes, the home of every exile, the Cardinal was nevertheless still Archbishop of Lyons. It was thus by a decree of banishment that the Bourbon Government made him pay the penalty of being the Uncle of Bonaparte.

He rejoiced once more to meet an old friend and levite of former days, now a Missionary Bishop and after listening to his tale of woe, he gladly came to the rescue. As a foundation wherewith to establish his college, the Cardinal made him a donation of 30,000 francs and as a mark of personal friendship, presented him the beautiful painting that is one of the treasures of Spring Hill College today.

In token of gratitude to its founder, the college bears the Cardinal's name of Joseph.

Rejoicing in such unexpected success, Bishop Portier hastened his return to America on November 1, 1829. At 11:30 A. M. a vessel weighed anchor in the Port of Havre, France and set out on her long travel across the weary waters of ocean, she was destined for New Orleans, and carried on board fifty passengers of whom one was a Bishop, two were priest's and six were clerics- the future founders of Spring Hill College. The voyage was long; sunshine and storm, joy and sorrow made up its story.

Still the varying vicissitudes of fortune brought with them no fatal mishap and after a pause at New Orleans (from December 24th, to January 2,) to rest and change vessel, their sturdy little bark set out for home, and on the feast of Epiphany at 11:30 A. M. stood before the city by the sea, the city of so many prayers, and so many yearnings.

Additional Data: (cont'd)

Three large buildings, two in wood and one, the main building in brick were to constitute the establishment at least for the time being. And work must go on at once as every delay was a loss to all concerned, every resource was immediately called into action. The main edifice or college proper had naturally to take its time in going up. But not so with the frame buildings, so vigorously was work on them prosecuted that already in the beginning of July, Father Loras could announce in a letter to his brother in France, "Since yesterday we have settled down at Spring Hill, we have put up two frame houses, and now we are busy digging the foundation of our college. The work will this week be finished and then on Sunday or Monday will be solemnly laid the corner stone, which, event will be attended with booming on cannon, that is to usher on the Fourth of July or Independence Day."

The frame buildings progressed rapidly to a finish, but the main edifice owing to the more complicated nature of things, moved on so slowly to completion that not before May 1831, could it offer a home to the community, meantime under the vigilant eye of the Bishop and the guiding care of the builder (Mr. Berdujon) the principal edifice rose gradually in graceful form and imposing proportions. Although the erection of the several collegiate buildings was a matter of time that called for patience, still no delay was on any account suffered to take place in the opening of classes, many and serious reasons counselled an immediate commencement of studies. Indeed so well was this fact appreciated that almost at once on the arrival of Bishop Portier from Europe, he announced, and by all the voices of report came to be announced the establishment of an institution of learning at Mobile. The good news occasioned - general rejoicing in the city and was all the talk of the surrounding country. Indeed it meant much to the little seaport. It meant life and trade and wealth and culture and general prosperity hence, - Protestants as well as Catholics applauded the good tidings.

God's Providence was visible all around, for nature seemed to have foreseen and provided for every want, water flowed abundantly, and an improved brick kiln furnished an excellent product made with the fine clay found on the bend of the hillside towards the west, and not far from the present form. In one of his letters Father Loras tells us that the ubiquitous darkey, too, was there and in numbers.

Rt. Rev. Michael Portier was one of that devoted band of French Missioners that in 1817 answered the appeal of Bishop Dubourg to come to the forlorn portion of the Lord's vineyard. Splendid talents and splendid success marked him for future pre-eminence among the many, that in his day distinguished the great Seminary

Additional Data: (cont'd)

of Lyons, but zeal for God's glory made him forget self and only ask some humble field in foreign lands to satisfy his thirst for self sacrifice. After landing at Annapolis, Maryland, he began the study of English under the hospitable roof of Charles Carroll of Carrollton.

Thence he went to St. Louis where from deacon, that he was, he became priest, shortly after ordination one of his first sick calls communicated to him the yellow fever that brought him to death's door, soon after recovery Bishop Dubourg, aware of his great talents and energy, appointed him his Vicar General in New Orleans to face the storms that then assailed the church of that city. Such was the life that he infused into religion and the energy with which he handled the situation that years after at the crisis of their revolt, the rebellious trustees of New Orleans dreaded him, even in his far away diocese and rightly for even at that distance he contributed much to bring them at last to terms. On receiving the Bulls of appointment to his new Bishopric, he in his great humility returned them to Rome as unworthy of the dignity. But on a peremptory order to obey, he with characteristic energy set out on horseback and travelled thus to St. Louis to be consecrated there. A great spirit of faith and great energy mark his whole long episcopate of thirty-four years. Though peculiarly endowed for the task appointed him by providence, still even in the more honorable fields of European toil, his great talents somewhat obscured in the humble missions of America would have fitted him to rival the ablest many, and among them, Clarke, the Historian praise his admirable letters and the latter ever gives a list of them. Numbers of his eloquent sermons lived in tradition for long years after his death. After a long life of zeal, and self sacrifice he in the year 1859, slept peacefully in the Lord; and the Cathedral erected by his zeal and genius rises like a glorious monument above his resting place. His spirit of faith was very remarkable and as a consequence his reliance on Divine Providence.

When in the light of experience and history one considers his happy choice of a location for his college, he is inclined to ask if inspiration did not lead the holy man's doubling steps to the spot, unique in every excellence. Indeed had he desired to locate his college in some famous health resort, medical authorities tell us he could not have made a better choice.

The Right Reverend Michael Portier was consecrated Titular Bishop of Olena, and Vicar Apostolic of the Floridas in St. Louis by Bishop Rosati. On November 5, 1828, Bishop Portier bought thirty-five acres of land in Spring Hill from Mr. Robertson, and soon after 380 acres adjoining from the city of Mobile. He was very much pleased with the place and in 1829, he built a frame house to serve as study hall and residence for the priest's. It was for many years used as an infirmary, and stood in front of the present Refectory building and parallel to it.

In the summer of 1828, Bishop Portier sailed for Europe, going to France in the hope of procuring co-laborers for his vast Vicariate. He returned on the ship Antioch reaching New

Additional Data: (cont'd)

Orleans on Christmas Eve 1929, and on January 3, he sailed for Mobile on a Schooner and arrived there about midday of the feast of Epiphany. He went at once to the Cathedral (20X30 ft.) where he celebrated mass and sang Te Deum in thanksgiving for his safe return to his destitute flock. The Holy See having in the meantime erected the See of Mobile, Bishop Portier also celebrated on this occasion his installation, as first Bishop of Mobile.

The Bishop brought with him from France two Priest's Father Matthias Lorias, and Gabriel Chalon, and six seminarians, Messrs. Massippe, Beroujon, Poujeade, Guinand, Rampon and Falet.

Bishop Portier established the college in 1830, its first president being Father Matthias Lorias, the college was located in the de Vendel Building and counted about forty students. This building was situated near the present residence of Dr. Roe, not far from the electric railroad. In 1830 the central part of the college was built of brick. The building had a kind of low basement, the first story was 15 ft. high, the second 13 ft. and the third 11 ft. The entrance to the college was from the South, from the old Pascagoula Road, the facade was adorned with eight Tuscan columns of 36 ft. in height. The building was 133 ft. long and 48 ft. wide. A frame church was built to the West of the college.

The Bishop is the life and soul of everything around the college, taking part in the games and pastimes of the boys. Father Bazin is President,, there are four Professors and ninety boys.

On the night of February 4, 1869, about 11:15 a fire is discovered in the centre part of the college building, the alarm is given and all the students and inmates are roused from their sleep and escape safely, the flames spread rapidly and after a few hours the large college building, the two frame houses on the South side and the Church are a heap of smouldering ruins. The library, the museum with its precious collections became a prey to the flames. The next morning February 4, the students about 90 in number together with their teachers leave for St. Charles College, Grand Coteau, La. where classes are resumed after a few days. The President Rev. J. Montillot, S. J., Rev. A. Cornette S. J., Rev. R. Olliver S. J. and a few brothers remain at Spring Hill and occupy the brick building used at present as an infirmary. After some deliberation, it is decided to rebuild the college, a few days after the fire the ruins are cleared away, the plans for the new college is drawn up by Mr. James Freret of New Orleans, and Ch. Fricke takes the contract.

On April 25, the octave of the patronage of St. Joseph, the corner stone of the new college is solemnly blessed by the Rt. Rev. John Quinlin, Bishop of Mobile, assisted by Rev. A. D. Pellicer, Rev. J. Brown, Rev. C. T. Ocallaghan, Rev. D. Omeara, Rev. E. Loregan, Rev. J. Moynahan, Rev. A. Jourdan S. J., Rev. J. Montillot S. J., Rev. F. Gautrelet S. J., Rev. A. Cornette S. J.

Additional Data: (cont'd)

and a vast concourse of people from Mobile, and other neighbouring towns. In the cornerstone the following inscription in parchment is enclosed.

"Hoc collegium sub titulo Sancti Josephi in Pago Spring Hill a Reverendissimo Michaelo Portier, primo Mobiliensi Episcopo, A. D. 1830 erectum et a P. P. Societatis Jesu susceptum annis vero. 1852 - 1859 - 1860. adauctum perfectum que dirissimum incendium die 4, Februarii an 1869, penitus diruit. Qua calamitate minime fracti, sed spem in deum erigentes, animum in primis faciente, benefactore insigni, Reverendissimo nerpe Joanne Quinlin, secundo Mobiliensi. Episcopo, Patres Societatis Jesu collegium a fundamentis ad junentatem chistianam in religionis et scientiarum cultu instituendam reedificare decreverunt quare, hoc die festo. Sti Marci Dominica IV post Pascham 25 Aprilis, A. D. 1869 and pontificatus P. II. Papae LX, feliciter Regnantis 23 Reverendissimo J. Quinlin, decimum annum in sede Mobiliensi agente. Adm Re. Petro Beck X, Soc Praeposetro Generali Re. P. S. Gaillard, Soc Jesu Prov. Leegd, Praep Excell. Duce Ulysse Grant. Reipublicae Strat Unitorum Praeside Excell Smith, Stat Alabama Gubernatore magna astante populi faventis corona, hunc lapidem angularum idem illustrissimus, ansistes Joannes Quinlin benedixit posuit s ignavit. In cujus rei memoriam nomen infra scripserunt.

Joannes Quinlin Episcopus Mobiliensis Antonius Jourdent. Superior Miss (neo, aurelianensis) Joannes Montillot, Rector Coll. S. Josephi Jacobus, Freret, Architecta, Carolus Fricke, Aedificator. "

October 1, the college is roofed, December 8, the new college opens with 53 students. A solemn High Mass is celebrated with Te Deum and Veni Creator.

Source of Material : Extracts from book published at the seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the College.

"SPRING HILL COLLEGE "  
1830 - 1905.

Compiled by: Katherine Floyd.  
Auburn, Alabama.  
Approved: E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer, HABS.  
Auburn, Alabama.  
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*W* 6/14/37